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COURIER 05/18/2008

Feds to start pulling out of Cattle Congress before next weekend

PAT KINNEY, Courier News Editor

WATERLOO - Federal officials are anticipated to move out of at least some buildings on the National Cattle Congress grounds before next weekend, after utilizing the fairgrounds as a holding facility for detainees from Monday's federal immigration raid at Agriprocessors in Postville.

NCC general manager Doug Miller said several NCC-located events will go on as previously scheduled, even though the federal government's lease of the fairgrounds extends through Sunday, May 25.

Miller confirmed that fairgrounds activities related to the annual Fourth Street Cruise will go on as scheduled next weekend. That includes a Friday evening "show and shine" event at the Pepsi Pavilion parking lot, as well as the cruise dance Saturday night at Electric Park Ballroom, which was converted into a makeshift federal courtroom to hold initial court appearances for detainees.

"We tried to relocate that, but it could not be relocated," Miller said of the Cruise-related activities, and federal officials agreed to let the events go on as planned.

Also, Miller said a Midwest Shetland Breeders Show scheduled for Saturday and Sunday at Pullin-Simsen Livestock Arena, an outdoor facility west of McElroy Auditorium, will go on as scheduled.

Miller said he anticipates federal officials will begin moving out of the fairgrounds next week. He was not sure if they will be fully gone by next weekend, but he will receive a full update Monday.

The arrangement has been a "win-win situation" for both federal officials and NCC, Miller said, with federal officials adhering to schedule with NCC.

Federal officials had closed off public access to the fairgrounds since May 5. On May 12, federal officials raided Agriprocessors and detained 389 individuals on various immigration and criminal charges.

Because the government's lease of the fairgrounds ran for more than another week after the Postville raid, many in the community and beyond had speculated whether another immigration enforcement action would be staged from the fairgrounds.

Federal officials generally do not confirm or deny any pending enforcement action.